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THE

EMBASSADOR OF CHRIST:

A

SEMI-CENTENNIAL SERMON.

PREACHED AT THE NINETEENTH SESSION OF THE CINCINNATI ANNUAL
CONFERENCE, HELD AT PIQUA, OHIO, AUGUST 24-29, 1870.

BY REV. WILLIAM SIMMONS.

"Ask thy Father, and he will shew thee: thy Elders, and they will tell thee."—Deut. xxxii, 7.

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TO THE READER.

THE following discourse is an attempt to comply with the following resolutions passed at the session of the Cincinnati Conference, held in Hillsboro, Aug. 25—Sept. 1, 1869:

Whereas, Our esteemed and much-beloved Father, William Simmons, will, if God spare his life another year, have served half a century in the Itinerancy; therefore, be it

Resolved, That as a mark of the high esteem in which he is held by his co-laborers in the work of the Master, he be requested to preach a semi-centennial sermon at the next annual session of our Conference.

Resolved, That our prayer to Almighty God is, that he may be spared to fill the appointment.

M. P. GADDIS,
A. MEHARRY,
W. I. FEE.

SEMI-CENTENNIAL SERMON.

"Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God." 2 Cor. v, 20.

IN presenting this subject, I will consider, 1. The character and work of an ambassador. Literally, an ambassador is a minister of the highest rank, employed by one prince or State at the court of another, to manage the public concerns of his own prince or State, and representing the dignity and power of his own sovereign or State. The ambassador's loyalty to his own Government should be above suspicion. Before leaving his own country he receives definite and positive written instructions with reference to his duty; what he shall say and how he shall act while at the foreign court. He is not to flatter nor be flattered, so as in any wise to compromise the great and vital interests of his own Government. In his social intercourse with foreigners he should act in such a manner as deeply to impress all in whose society he mingles, that he represents—if, indeed, he does—a nation highly cultivated, not only in diplomatic wisdom, but also in pure morality, in truth, chastity, sobriety, nay temperance; for what business has a wine-bibber to be managing the affairs of a great and virtuous nation at a foreign court?

2. I will consider the character and work of an ambassador of Christ. He is one sent of Christ to labor for the salvation of mankind, in the absence of Christ in his personal presence on earth. It was a wonderful exhibition of God's love to the fallen race, to give his only begotten Son, who from eternity was co-equal with him, to come into this world of sin to suffer and die,

that the rebel race might have life and not perish. And next to this wonderful display of Divine goodness, may we not consider his wonderful and great condescension in connecting fallen, redeemed, saved man with himself, in developing the great and gracious work of saving man?

God did not employ holy angels to come to us with the message of mercy and grace, but chose men of like passions with ourselves to preach to us the Gospel of Christ. We must never for a moment lose sight of the fact that it is Christ that calls the minister, for no man taketh this honor unto himself but he that is called of God, as was Aaron. Hence, the Gospel ministry is not a mere profession, but a Divine calling—the authority calling him is the highest in the universe, for Christ is King of kings and Lord of lords—and the ambassador is to represent the character, dignity, power, and goodness of the Holy Trinity as clearly revealed in the Bible, exhibited in the great plan of salvation by Christ. His instructions are clearer and more solemn than those given to any ambassador sent from one nation to another; for if he should take away from his instructions, God will take away from him his part out of the Book of Life, or if he should add any thing to his instructions, God will add to him the plagues written in the Bible.

When we consider the dignity and power of the Being calling a mortal man into the holy ministry, and the work to be performed, well may we tremble and halt at the very threshold of the work. No man should ever venture into this holy work unless he is fully satisfied that God, for Christ's sake, has pardoned all his sins, and adopted him into his holy family. Then, too, he must be fully satisfied that he is inwardly moved by the Holy Ghost to preach the Gospel. It will be safe for all, feeling something of this inward moving of the Spirit, to pray and wait, and if God is really calling him to this work, he will impress the same thing on the heart of the Church, and she will open his way. A further confirmation of his call to preach the Gospel is this: When he exercises in prayer, exhortation, etc., God gives him liberty and enlargement of soul, sinners are awakened, and believers are edified. Whatever other qualifications he may pos-

sess—the more the better—unless the man is soundly converted to God, and clearly called by the Holy Spirit to preach, he can never be an ambassador of Christ.

The qualifications briefly presented, will appear the more important when we consider the ambassador's work. He is to beseech and pray sinners, in Christ's stead, to be reconciled to God, and O, what a work! It

“Might fill an angel's heart,
And filled a Savior's hands.”

It is here evidently implied that sinners in their natural state are not reconciled to God, but are enemies in their hearts, and manifesting it by their ungodly lives. The ambassador comes beseeching the sinners to lay down their arms of rebellion, cease their hostility, and be reconciled to God. What condescension on the part of God, thus to intreat men to accept free pardon at his hands!

The awfully solemn character of the pastor's work will appear clearly when we look at it in the light of revelation. “Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me. When I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die; and thou givest him not warning, nor speakest to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life; the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thy hand. Yet if thou warn the wicked, and he turn not from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul.” Ezekiel iii, 17, 18, 19. What a powerful motive is here presented to honest fidelity in the pastor's work! O, may I and my brethren be found pure from the blood of souls, when we appear before the judgment-seat of Christ to give an account of our stewardship!

It was with some such views of the magnitude of the minister's work, although not as definitely understood then as now, that, after an indescribable mental conflict for four years after I felt that God for Christ's sake had freely pardoned all my sins, I solemnly, and in the fear of God, gave myself wholly to the work of calling sinners to be reconciled to God. On the

17th day of July, 1820, in the house of Benjamin Penn, near the Gregg camp-ground, I was examined by Rev. J. B. Finley, presiding elder, before the large quarterly-meeting conference of White Oak circuit. Here I was licensed to preach, and recommended to the Ohio Conference, which that year sat in Chillicothe, August 7th, where I was received into the traveling connection.

One question, by the presiding elder, and my answer, before I was licensed to preach, I shall never forget: "Do you think," said the elder, "that it is your duty to give yourself wholly to the work of the ministry?" I replied, "If God has called me at all, he has called me to give up every thing else." I received my first appointment to the Piqua circuit, Rev. W. Westlake in charge part of the year, and Rev. L. Swormstedt the balance of the year. We had twenty-eight appointments; our rest days were gained by preaching twice a day a few times. The circuit then included the two Piqua stations, two Troy stations, a portion of Concord circuit, New Carlisle, Tremont, Addison, Fletcher, Lockington, and Brant, Palmer, Wayne, and Pisgah chapels, and a portion of the territory now embraced in the Central Ohio Conference. Rev. J. B. Finley was my presiding elder.

Our custom in those days was to lead class after preaching. We would as soon have thought of omitting preaching as to have omitted the class-meeting. People came to church to worship God, they prayed before they came, and expected to be blessed and go home happy. The idea that some have, that this kind of drill was necessary to train the ignorant, uncultivated Christian in the knowledge of Divine things is simply a ridiculous evidence of the ignorance of the character of the Christian men and women of those days. Many of them were giants in the knowledge of Bible truth and personal Christian experience, who would put many Doctors of Divinity to the blush. No, they attended class because the fire of God's love was in their souls, and they, like David, loved to tell it to all who feared the Lord; and I say fearlessly, that no substitute has ever been, nor do I believe will ever be found for the class-meeting. I believe that if we would pray more and legislate less, it would add to our spirituality and moral power as a Church.

I was greatly encouraged in the beginning of my itinerant life by my godly parents, now in glory; my father favored me with a good letter frequently, which put courage into my trembling heart. In one of those letters, dated July, 1821, he speaks thus: "Yours, my child, is a place of the greatest importance that ever man filled on the earth; therefore give up your whole soul, body, and all you have, to God and his cause; lean on him for succor, who is able and will support you while you put your trust in him. Be faithful in the discharge of every duty, always remembering that the way of duty is the way of safety. Though you may sow in weakness, if you are humble at your Master's feet, God will bless your labors and crown them with success. I assure you that your friends and classmates pray much for you, that you may succeed. Keep clear of pride, that cursed sin which spoils so many promising young men, and is a fatal dagger to vital holiness. You are running a race, my child, not for an earthly prize; if you were, I never could have consented to let you go. Although painful to be parted in body, yet the pleasing prospect that at last we shall meet in heaven, fills my soul with love, and I can say, Go wherever duty calls. Don't let the affection you have for your parents and friends prevent you from the discharge of your duty. Try to preach Christ so plainly and faithfully as to make your people feel sensible that you are seeking their salvation."

I may here say that I have kept my vow that I took when I said, I will do that part of the work which my brethren, subject to the same rule, shall judge best. Then, too, there were many wise, godly men and women on the circuit, who held up my hands and helped me in the Lord, and at whose feet I sat and learned many good lessons. Among the many, I may name mother Hendershott, I. Scudder, Rev. J. P. Finley, and Rev. J. Tatman.

On this, my first circuit, I had plenty of beech swamps, which sometimes were almost impassable. One instance I will record: In February, 1821, between where Westville now stands and Piqua, I had twelve miles of a wilderness, mud deep and frozen, but not hard enough to bear my horse; the poor animal

was plunging and his legs bleeding. Here I was attacked by Satan, who whispered, "You are killing your horse, hence sinning against God; you are running before you are sent; so go home to the farm." Darkness seemed to surround me, I felt like sinking; then I prayed to the Lord to show me what was my duty; my heart was melted into tenderness, the tears rolled down my cheeks, my soul was filled with joy, and I made the grand old beech woods vocal with shouts of salvation. Praise the Lord, O my soul! Just then my noble horse moved off without any apparent trouble. I reached my appointment in due time, preached in a cabin with liberty, and had a glorious class-meeting.

At the time I joined the Conference its bounds may be indicated by the following list of districts, namely: Ohio district, William Swayze presiding elder; Muskingum district, Jonathan Stamper presiding elder; Lancaster district, Charles Waddle presiding elder; Scioto district, John Collins presiding elder; Lebanon district, J. B. Finley presiding elder; Miami district, Walter Griffith presiding elder; Kentucky district, Alexander Cummins presiding elder. So you see the Conference reached from Western Pennsylvania into Indiana, and from Charleston, West Virginia, to Green Bay. My presiding elders have been Revs. J. B. Finley, J. Strange, G. R. Jones, R. Bigelow, T. A. Morris, W. B. Christie, J. Quinn, D. Young, M. Marlay, S. Hamilton, W. H. Raper, J. M. Trimble, W. I. Ellsworth, D. Reed, D. Warnock, J. F. Chalfant, A. Lowrey, W. H. Sutherland, and J. W. Weakley; and I can say, to the best of my recollection, I never had any difficulty with any of my presiding elders. I have been in the district work fourteen years, circuit work seventeen years, and stations and half-stations—one of which, Hamilton, had eleven appointments to be filled every two weeks—eighteen years, and one year an agent for the Freedmen's Aid Society.

When I joined the Conference there were in the United States eleven Conferences, nine hundred and four traveling preachers, two hundred and forty thousand nine hundred and twenty-four members, there being a net increase that year of fifteen thousand nine hundred and fifty-seven members. When

we review the past and consider the present, well may we exclaim, "What hath God wrought through his ambassadors of one branch of his visible Church! What gratitude should fill the heart of every living pastor, to know that the Gospel of Christ, presenting a universal atonement, and free salvation for all mankind, as preached by the ministers of the Methodist Episcopal Church, has taken such deep root in the hearts of the people, and has produced, and is still producing, such an abundant harvest of immortal souls, through the Word preached, a present, free, and full salvation! Glory be to God and the Lamb forever and ever, amen!"

The manner of presenting the Gospel adhered to by our fathers, and which has produced such wonderful results, is beautifully presented in our excellent Discipline where it reads, "What is the best general method of preaching? *Answer.* 1. To convince; 2. To offer Christ; 3. To invite; 4. To build up; and to do this in some measure in every sermon. *Question* 2. What is the most effectual way of preaching Christ? *Answer.* The most effectual way of preaching Christ is to preach him in all offices, and to declare his law as well as his Gospel both to believers and unbelievers. Let us strongly and closely insist upon inward and outward holiness in all its branches." If these views be correct, those who insist on presenting new, not to say strange things, to the people in order to keep up an interest, unless they guard the subject with care, may do much harm. Whatever new thing may be presented, the above directions should be strictly and honestly adhered to, and Christ will see to it that the interest in the congregation and in the preachers will be kept up; for souls will be saved, and wherever souls are coming home to God there will be interest felt and manifested in the Church and in the community. Paul was not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, because it was the power of God unto salvation, as it always has been and always will be when truly and faithfully preached. And I do insist on it, that the main design of preaching the Gospel is to reach the heart of the sinner and bring him to a sense of his lost condition and lead him to Christ. Then he must be trained in the way of holiness, to prepare him

for heaven; and should we ever lose sight of this great idea and suppose that mental culture will be sufficient to lead the sinner to God and heaven, *Ichabod* will be written on us, for our glory will have departed.

We must still preach the great cardinal truths of the Gospel as did our fathers. In order to do this effectually we must have inwrought in our own souls the great doctrines of revelation, verified and demonstrated in our personal salvation, having the fire of God's love so burning, and the love of souls for whom Christ died flaming within us as to constrain us with strong arguments, crying, and tears to come armed thus from the Lord to pray sinners in Christ's stead to be reconciled to God, and the minister should look and labor faithfully for immediate results in the salvation of souls.

In view, then, of this whole subject, I would say that the direct care of souls, as committed to the pastor, is the most important work ever intrusted to mortal man on earth; and any one who has been called by the Head of the Church to preach and watch for souls, and then for any cause comes to look on the pastoral work as inferior to any other, or makes it a stepping-stone to some other position, or place of more distinction, or one that will give him more money, whether that position be that of agent, editor, professor, president of college, or even bishop, is in error; and if he lays his plans and manages to get out of the regular pastoral work into some other position of more ease, honor, or profit, he sins against God, and hinders the march of Christ's glorious kingdom on earth. If no man here ever did this, none will wince; but if any have, I pray that God may lead all such to repentance and full salvation from all pride and sinful ambition! I love to see talents and piety noticed and elevated to places of mark and distinction, but let this come in a regular way, without being sought after, or managed for; let it appear to all good and wise men, who have the cause of God at heart, that the change is according to the will of God in the absence of all human plottings. I would further say, that if a man is truly called of God to give himself wholly to the work of the ministry, it is unsafe for him to turn aside to any other

business. I have seen some do this and appear to become wealthy who now live in obscurity, without any ministerial character, or have died poor. Hence, I fully believe that if we are faithful, and do our whole duty, we will be sustained by the Church and the Great Head of the Church. I therefore advise no young man to engage in the work of the ministry until he is fully satisfied that God has called him thereunto; then, let him live near the cross, keep the holy fire burning in his soul, and never indulge the thought for one moment of turning aside to any other work. I here advise what I have tried to practice, although often in great weakness and with many imperfections.

In the fifty years of my itinerant life I have traveled more than one hundred thousand miles, preached more than five thousand times, witnessed many glorious revivals of religion, seen more than ten thousand members brought into the Methodist Episcopal Church, and during this time have received, in all, about twenty thousand dollars. Somehow, by rigid economy, I have kept square with the world, and do not feel fearful that I shall come to want in my old age, for I have God's promise that my bread and water shall be secure. I rejoice greatly in the outward prosperity of the Church, the multiplication of churches, colleges, and seminaries, especially of our female institutions, and the increase of conferences from eleven to seventy-one; and while I would avoid croaking I can not forget the history of other Churches, nor be blind to our own danger of trusting to our outward success, as an evidence of Divine favor, and losing the unction of the Holy Ghost.

Our mode of traveling in those days was on horseback, often through an unbroken forest, guided by marks on the trees and frequently in deep mud, nay, mire; more than once has my horse swamped down, I having to dismount and help the poor animal up, wading out, leading my faithful horse. On the London circuit my horse fell under me and was dead in five minutes, leaving me without means of traveling, and far from home. In this trial the friends rallied under the direction of my colleague, Rev. D. D. Davisson; collections were made, including gifts of cows, calves, and two barrels of nice home-made sugar;

and in about six weeks I was mounted on as good a horse as the one I had lost. Besides these gifts, I received that year forty-eight dollars quarterage; I thanked God and took courage. On Brush Creek circuit I was, on one occasion, carried into deep water, and was in great danger of drowning, but was saved, praise the Lord!

From Brush creek Circuit I was sent to Detroit district, which then included the whole of Michigan and Ohio from the Wyandot Mission to the michigan line, and was also stationed in the city of Detroit, then numbering about forty-five members all told. This was a great trial of my faith; but on the way brother Baughman and I spent the Sabbath among the Wyandots, with the families of brothers Finley and Brooke. Here I preached to the Indians through I. Pointer, a colored man, as interpreter. I had such liberty and received such a baptism of the Holy Spirit that I went on cheerfully and happy to my work, and had a pleasant year among whites and Indians, in the city of two thousand five hundred inhabitants, in deep mud and swimming rivers. When I started for Conference I was just out of what threatened to be a fatal illness; a brother accompanied me in a buggy to Monroe; twice on the way we stuck fast in the swamps, and had a clever Yankee wade in, waist deep, and pull us out with his oxen; my friend waded out and went after help, and I sat and sung

“To patient faith the prize is sure,” etc.,

and was happy, glory to God! I got safely to Conference, and in such a feeble state of health that I asked to be relieved from the district and station, which was granted, and I was sent to Chillicothe, which alarmed me more than it would had I been remanded back to Detroit, as this was then the most important station in the Conference outside of Cincinnati.

Here I preached what in these days would be called a political sermon, for in those days we preached against sins by names; and woe be to the office-seeker if he arrayed himself on the side of sin and immorality in any shape, whether it was in favor of drinking, swearing, Sabbath-breaking, or getting up balls and

dances to draw off the young members of the Church into sin and folly; and the beauty of the thing was, that the men of the Church, who, in every respect, were the chief men of the city, with such men as Govs. Tiffin and Worthington, with many others among them, would hold up their heads and say amen, while many would shout "Salvation," while the faithful pastor was declaring the truth of God faithfully, and clearing his skirts of the blood of souls. The time alluded to was one of the happiest periods in my history; the enemy was foiled, the Church saved, and a ball announced for the 22d of February, was abandoned. Glory to God! my heart leaps for joy while I think of the scenes of that conflict; and glorious conquest. I preached then against dancing and balls because I believed then, as I do now, that they are the great engines of the devil and wicked men to draw souls from Christ and lead them to eternal ruin; and unless we put these things away from us, the Lord will curse us with leanness, and we will be chargeable with the blood of souls in the day of judgment. I always thought more of a good conscience and what I believed to be the smiles of God, than I did of the good opinions of men; yet I always deferred cheerfully to the judgment of men and women in whom I had full confidence as godly persons living in the enjoyment of religion, seeking to please God rather than men; but when I suspected that any one wanted to blunt the edge of my sword, I felt like being off from them and taking lessons from the Word of the Lord which abideth forever.

In closing the fiftieth year of my itinerant life, I do devoutly thank the Lord for all his mercies to me, and I thank my brethren in the ministry for all their kindnesses, and Christian forbearance, and prayers while I have gone in and out before the Church. And now a few words to the official and private members of the Church: Beloved brothers and sisters, having spoken freely of and to the ministers of Christ, will you suffer the word of exhortation in the language of St. Paul: "Receive us; we have wronged no man, we have corrupted no man, we have defrauded no man." 2 Cor. vii, 2. No minister will ever be sent to you but such as is approved by his Conference annually—and what Church keeps such watch over her ministers as does

our Church? When your minister arrives, don't stand off to see whether he is your style of a minister or not, but receive him cheerfully, and pray for him, that he may feed your souls that year. Whether, like Paul, he is a mighty reasoner, or an eloquent orator, like Apollos, or, like Peter, a son of thunder, through whom God's violated law speaks forth in terrors, if you will pray and help your preacher, you will grow in grace under his ministry; if you do not, you will backslide under the ministry of the best preacher in the Church.

In concluding this sermon, let me say that I still view the ambassador's work as the most important trust ever committed to mortal man by the Great Head of the Church, the Good Shepherd of the flock, purchased by the blood of the Lamb; and also that our great itinerant plan, properly worked and faithfully carried out, affords a field for ministerial usefulness to be found nowhere else in this fallen, but redeemed world of ours; and viewing this work as I do, with the toil and happiness in it, and the glory to be revealed more and more to all eternity, if I could see all the losses and crosses, deep rivers, creeks, and swamps, and the storms and chilling blasts by day, and sometimes poor shelter by night, through which I have passed during the last fifty years, and had to begin life again, feeling called, as I did, to warn sinners to flee the wrath to come, I would say, My Lord and Master, if it be thy will, I will take the fifty years of itinerant toil and the glory that shall follow.

Soldiers of the Cross, companions in itinerant toil, I ask you, each and all, to join me, with all Christian people, in prayer to God that I may stand firmly, and finally fall at the post of duty covered with the glory of victory, finishing my course with joy and the ministry that I have received of the Lord Jesus! My prayer is that you may live long, and be faithful ministers of Christ, and come at last with many sheaves, and many stars! O what a glorious meeting we shall have in our Father's house above! Those who have spent their lives in calling sinners to be reconciled to God will meet before the throne of God and say, "Here I am, and the children that thou hast given me," and casting our crowns and honor at the feet of Jesus, then shall

we join in one general and joyful band, saying, "Unto him that loved us, and hath washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto his father, to him be glory and dominion forever;" while the walls of heaven shall ring with the loud shouts of glory! glory! halleluiah! praise the Lord, O my soul! The view of that happy day, though it may be distant fires my soul, and I will shout glory! glory! halleluiah! praise the Lord!

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